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ARTICLES:

- (1) Views on six-party talks: Narrowing Japan's choices in responding to North Korea

By Masao Okonogi, professor at Keio University (specialist on North Korean politics)

I think the greatest feature of the latest round of the six-party talks is that the United States and North Korea led the talks without China's intermediation. Japan must have not expected the outcome of the negotiations.

Japan was unable to see any progress on the issue of North Korea's abductions of Japanese nationals. Therefore Japan has only two choices in responding to North Korea.

The one choice for Japan is to place priority on public opinion, which means that Japan will maintain the present hard-line stance against Pyongyang, including sanctions. If Tokyo picks this option, it should be ready to pay the price of being left behind in the implementation of the agreement at the six-party talks, as well as in the area of international cooperation.

The other choice is to cooperate with other six party talks member countries in providing North Korea with energy and humanitarian aid for the time being in order to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue in line with the agreement this time around at the multinational talks. Under this option, however, it will be difficult to convince the Japanese public, which think a great deal of the abduction issue. Since Japan agreed to the deal, it will likely be pressed to extend energy and other aid to North Korea.

Japan will attach importance to public opinion for the time being, but it will likely be gradually forced to cooperate with other

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multinational talks member countries, shifting its policy.

North Korea probably sees through Japan's such intention. The Japanese government will be unable to take any action until the July House of Councillors election ends. Even if working groups are set up, Japan will not be able to participate in the working groups.

However, development in US-North Korea relations will surely have an impact on issues between Japan and North Korea.

The United States and North Korea admitted each other's core principle at the latest talks. Washington has obtained a basic agreement from Pyongyang on denuclearization. The Bush administration can play up it has attained more achievements than did the Clinton government.

Having conducted a nuclear test, North Korea was able to secure the path to gradually receive aid. It was also able to set up a working group to discuss normalization of relations with the United States, as well as to get compensation.

It can be said that Pyongyang was able to hold fast to its assertion that the United States should provide energy aid and lift its financial sanctions on it, as well as eventual normalize bilateral relations. However, the question in the future is the speed of the process.

Speedy progress on denuclearization is needed for the Bush administration to impress its achievements in East Asia that can write off the deadlock in its Iraq policy, while stressing differences with the Agreed Framework concluded between the Clinton administration and Pyongyang. Washington also will have to promote quickly normalization of diplomatic ties with the North.

North Korea appears to be see this as a good chance to attack the Bush government, which is in the final stage of its term.

It is, however, difficult to predict how far normalization will progress. It is because progress largely depends on decisions by President Bush and North Korean leader Kim Jong Il.

The Bush administration will be able to stress the certain level of diplomatic achievements if it can resolve the immediate nuclear crisis.

The common belief is that chances are that more progress will be made under the post-Bush government.

(2) Editorial: Don't trust North Korea until it abandons nuclear programs

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)
February 14, 2007

Delegates to the six-party talks, which wrapped up on Feb. 13 in Beijing, adopted a joint document stipulating initial steps to be taken by the five parties and North Korea respectively toward the North's denuclearization.

The document is significant as a first step to urge North Korea to dismantle its nuclear programs. Keeping in mind the bitter experience of the collapse of the 1994 Agreed Framework between the United States and North Korea, the five parties - Japan, the US,

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China, South Korea, and Russia - must remain cautious until the last day of the process of Pyongyang's denuclearization. It is more important than before for the five parties to take joint steps from now.

The joint document stipulates that the five countries will provide Pyongyang with energy aid in return for dismantling its nuclear facilities. This pattern, though, is similar to that in the 1994 accord.

A different point is that the joint document calls for a two-phase system in which North Korea shuts down and seals its nuclear facilities as the first phase and then disables all existing nuclear facilities as the next phase, unlike "the freeze of all nuclear facilities" in the 1994 accord. The joint document specifies measures to be implemented by North Korea and energy aid provided to it by the five countries in each phase.

In the first phase, North Korea is required to shut down and seal its nuclear facilities in Yongbyon, with the aim of dismantling them in the end, and to receive inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency within 60 days.

The five parties drew deeply suspicious North Korea into the negotiating table and had it agree to abandon its nuclear programs. This can be taken as a one step forward.

In the six-party talks in September 2005, though, North Korea had also promised to "abandon its all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs". Only one year after this promise, Pyongyang carried out a nuclear test. Given this, whether North Korea agreed to abandon its nuclear programs in all sincerity should be judged after the 60-day initial phase.

The two-phase system might be intended to prevent Pyongyang from breaking its promise after receiving heavy fuel oil. But that nation might come up with more extravagant demands during this period.

The main reason why North Korea agreed on the joint document was because the economic and financial sanctions by the US have worked effectively. In the second rounds of bilateral talks between the US and North Korea in Berlin and Beijing, Pyongyang desperately tried to find a way out. There is no need for the US to rush for a settlement with such a country.

The US promised to start the process of removing its economic sanctions and not to remove them. The US should be cautious about lifting the financial sanctions. If the US is in a hurry, North Korea might believe that the US, preoccupied with the Iraq and Iran issues, softened its stance toward it. It is important (for the US) to be always ready to tighten the reins. Even so, the document also inserted the wording, "the principle of taking actions in accordance

with actions," so the North, taking advantage of this, might press the US to immediately terminate the sanctions.

The Japanese government is dogged with the difficult challenge of how to bring up the abduction issue in the six-party talks. Five working groups, including one on normalizing diplomatic ties between Japan and North Korea, will be set up under the give-party agreement. The document implies that progress should be made at the five groups simultaneously. To prevent delayed progress at one group, discussion on the abduction issue might be wrapped up. Japan must be cautious in making a response.

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(3) Editorial: Agreement at six-party talks; Move nuclear issue forward to find way out of impasse in abduction issue

ASAHI (Page 3) (Full)
February 14, 2007

It has been four years since North Korea openly resumed its nuclear development program. It even carried out a nuclear weapon test last year, deepening the crisis. However, a step has now been taken toward finding a breakthrough in this situation.

At the six-party talks held in Beijing, an agreement was reached detailing the actions the participating countries should now take to reach the goal of North Korea scrapping its nuclear programs.

The agreement is filled with forward-looking contents, as if to reverse the previous trend: North Korea is to suspend and seal its nuclear reactors and related facilities in Yongbyon and accept monitoring by an international agency; each concerned country is to offer 50,000 tons of heavy fuel oil as energy aid; and additional 950,000 tons will be extended as the North moves through each stage toward abolishing its nuclear programs.

The US will begin the work of lifting the designation of North Korea as a terrorist-supporting nation. Japan will launch talks to normalize ties with that nation.

The international community has been repeatedly betrayed by pledges made by North Korea. It may be too optimistic to view that the agreement reached this time will be realized smoothly. However, we welcome that a comprehensive agreement was reached to this extent, starting with the suspension of the North's nuclear activities. The only course now is to make sure, using the agreement as a lever, that the North takes steps toward abandoning its nuclear programs.

Some may oppose the idea of offering assistance to North Korea, which has continued a brinkmanship diplomacy using nuclear arms as the card. However, the only way to find a breakthrough in the present situation, where North Korea has gone as far as to conduct a nuclear test, is to make a compromise and reward that nation for giving up its nuclear programs. This is the reality.

There are, of course many, challenges.

North Korea must reveal all of its nuclear programs, including the nuclear weapons that have already been made, and dismantle them. It is also necessary for the relevant international agency to monitor that process in an effective way.

We want to see a taskforce meeting held as soon as possible to work out technical matters.

Uranium enrichment activities by North Korea have brought about the present situation, which is called the second nuclear crisis. The agreement reached this time does not clearly mention that point.

It will take some more time for North Korea to become able to make nuclear bombs using enriched uranium. As such, top priority is making North Korea seal its plutonium-based nuclear development. The agreement this time has apparently been based on such a stance.

We believe that the decision was rational. This is the issue we must

face sooner or later in order to realize the total scrapping of nuclear arms by North Korea.

The thorny issue is how Japan should respond. The government's position is that it will not intend to agree to shoulder the cost of heavy fuel oil assistance without progress on the abduction issue.

When the Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) questioned the prime minister whether that decision would meet national interests, he explained, "The matter is being worked out, based on the understanding that Japan will not offer heavy fuel oil. Other countries understand this position."

However, once North Korea begins the process of abandoning its nuclear programs, Japan should get involved in that process in a positive manner. That is because national interests in security terms largely depend on that.

A Japan-North Korea taskforce will be set up under the six-party talks. We must come up with resourcefulness to settle pending issues between the two countries.

We want to see efforts to find a breakthrough in the abduction issue by moving the nuclear issue forward.

(4) Editorial: Gov't must carry through principles

SANKEI (Page 2) (Full)
February 14, 2007

The six-party talks over North Korea's nuclear ambitions and other issues have now somehow reached an agreement, which came at the end of negotiations that faced rough going. Its contents, however, are uncertain and murky in many respects. The task in store from now on is how to verify North Korea's abandonment of its nuclear programs. North Korea must not be allowed ever again to exploit loopholes to continue developing nuclear weapons, nor must it be allowed to gain time.

In the six-party talks this time, Japan took the position that it would not cooperate in aiding North Korea in exchange for its shutting down of its nuclear facilities as long as there is no progress on the issue of Japanese nationals abducted to North Korea. Japan based its standpoint on this principle. In the end, the six-party talks saw no progress on the abduction issue. As it stands, Japan will not participate in the first phase of energy aid that will provide the North with fuel oil amounting to 50,000 tons. Japan carried through its principle. We want the government to remain committed to this principle.

The six-party members have now decided to set up five working groups for the future rounds of talks, including one on bilateral relations between Japan and North Korea. This is also a starting point. It has at least ensured bilateral talks on the abduction issue and other pending issues. Japan should not fail to utilize this forum.

Some people noted that Japan alone would be isolated in the talks of all six-party members as Japan was so much caught up on the abduction issue. However, that is an idle fear. Abduction is an issue that affects the lives of a country's people. Japan, should it compromise on this issue, would lose credibility at home and in the international community. Japan should not fear being isolated and should rather stand in sublime isolation.

The country that is isolated is not Japan but North Korea. This must not be forgotten. Abduction is a matter of serious concern. Now, China also shares this perception and stands on the side of Japan.

The six-party talks this time agreed on the "first steps" for North Korea to give up all its nuclear weapons programs. The six-party

members will reportedly continue to talk about "additional, phased steps" in their five working groups.

In a way, the agreement reached yesterday was unavoidable. That is because the near-term danger had to be eliminated. In the end, however, the five countries paid for North Korea's wrongdoings, including a nuclear test that North Korea intentionally created. It is regrettable that such incongruousness went unmentioned.

In due course, North Korea ought to stand strict trial for its wrongdoings, including its breach of promise, and for its crimes, such as abductions. If that is not the case, we will see the advent of criminal states like North Korea.

The biggest key to the North Korea problem is in the hands of the United States. It is essential for Japan to keep closely in touch with the United States.

(5) Kyuma vs. Moriya

BUNGEISHUNJU (Pages 234-5) (Full)
March 2007

The Ministry of Defense, only a month after it achieved its long-cherished desire to be elevated to a ministry, has already lost the confidence of the United States. The biggest problem has been the presence of Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma, who from the start has made the US angry by his series of "slips of the tongue." Not only has it been impossible to set the date for the Japan-US Security Consultative Council (2-plus-2 meeting), a meeting between Kyuma and Defense Secretary Gates also cannot be arranged.

The first problem arose when Kyuma, commenting on the US' launching of the Iraq war, remarked, "Japan's support for the US was never formal." Afterward, he corrected himself, saying that he had "not done my homework," but from his statement came a budding distrust.

Next, he came out with this thoughtless statement about the relocation of the US forces' Futenma Air Station: "It would be better to add some needed revisions." The pending issue for over 10 years had finally been resolved last spring by a meeting between then Defense Agency Director General Fukushima Nukaga and then Defense Secretary Rumsfeld. Anger flared up at the Pentagon, with one official saying, "Are they still of a mind to change (the agreement)?"

A Japanese newspaper's reporting of the contents of the joint Japan-US plan to prepare for a contingency on the Korean Peninsula was the last straw. For a plan that even posited the evacuation and taking refuge of the US forces to come out publicly was for the US comparable to revealing the US' strategy to the enemy. Convinced that the "leak" came from Kyuma, the US even strongly protested to the Japanese government.

In the backdrop has been discord between Kyuma and Administrative Vice Defense Minister Takemasa Moriya. In 1998, when the Defense

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Agency under Nukaga was rocked with scandal, the chance came for Moriya to be selected to serve as the chief of the secretariat. As vice minister, he created his own long-term administration. However, Kyuma and Nukaga were rival politicians within the old Takeshita faction of the Liberal Democratic Party.

Moreover, during the Koizumi administration, thanks to his good relationship with the prime minister's private secretary Kaoru Iijima, Moriya was the drafter of Okinawa policy. The fact that Kyuma is making statements that differ greatly from the policy line of Moriya is seen by the US side as a strange situation.

Kyuma has a history of doubt being cast on his ability going back to the time when the now deceased Seiroku Kajiyama was chief cabinet secretary. Voices are rising in the government for an early

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replacement of Kyuma, with some saying, "Nothing good will come as

long as we have Kyuma as defense minister."

(6) USFJ realignment: Focus on Guam relocation costs; 6 billion dollars to be called into question; Typhoons, poisonous snakes also factored in for estimated costs

ASAHI (Page 3) (Full)
February 10, 2007

Hitoshi Kujiraoka

A cabinet-endorsed bill drafted by the Defense Ministry for special measures to realign the presence of US forces in Japan was introduced to the Diet yesterday. The focus of Diet deliberations will now be on the propriety of costs to be covered by Japan for the planned relocation of US Marine Corps troops from Okinawa to Guam. The costs are an estimated 6 billion dollars. The mechanism of scraping up such a huge amount of money is complicated, and the grounds for such estimated costs will also be called into question. The bill incorporates a new bounty plan to subsidize base-hosting localities to be burdened with further US military functions in the process of realigning US forces in Japan. However, local governments are crying out against using such a carrot that is obviously intended to expedite the work of realigning the US military presence in Japan.

The costs for relocating USMC troops from Okinawa to Guam are 2.64 times higher than to move them to the US East Coast. The total costs for this USMC redeployment will be an estimated 10.27 billion dollars, with Japan covering 6.09 billion dollars of the total. These estimates are based on US military standards. According to the Defense Ministry's in-house documentation, the US military sets the regional coefficient of construction costs based on the national environment and other regional features. With the US East Coast being set at 1.0, Okinawa is at 1.43 and Guam at 2.64.

The grounds for 2.64 are described in this way. Guam is a remote island in the Pacific, so the US military recounts: 1) there is a shortage of infrastructure on the island for the construction of facilities, such as roadways; 2) workers must be hired from outside the island; 3) the shipping cost of construction and other materials is high; and 4) the maintenance cost of facilities is high due to the occurrence of natural disasters, such as typhoons, and due to the existence of poisonous snakes and other factors. The question is whether these grounds are reasonable, and the Diet will likely debate on this point.

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Furthermore, the Japanese government has worked out a complicated scheme of projects to raise 6.09 billion dollars. Of the 6.09 billion dollars to be covered by Japan, the Japanese government plans to invest 3.29 billion dollars in private-sector consortiums to be established on Guam as special purpose entities (SPE). This investment will be made through the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC). The SPE will construct housing for US military personnel. With its housing rent earnings, the SPE will pay back its debt to the Japanese government through the JBIC. In addition, the Japanese government will also build headquarters and billets.

But it is unclear how much money will be paid back to Japan. "More than half of the money will return." So saying, a top-level official of the Defense Ministry was upbeat. However, there is no time limit set for repayment. One Defense Ministry official expects the money to be repaid in 40-50 years because housing rent earnings from US military personnel will be appropriated for repayment. However, the Japanese government's investment in the SPE, given the life of housing, could be irrecoverable. The Japanese government also admits in its in-house document that its investment in the SPE is a project over an "ultra-long" period of time with low profitability, presuming that the government almost cannot expect dividends from its investment.

(7) Editorial: Diet debate; Opposition parties should bestir themselves

A question-and-answer session at the Lower House Budget Committee involving the ruling and opposition parties made one round. After skidding over Health Minister Yanagisawa's statement that women are "baby-making machines," Diet debate has at last entered a full-fledged war of words.

Naoto Kan, Katsuya Okada and Seiji Maehara, all of whom once served as head of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto), took the podium. This line-up of heavyweight debaters was probably chosen from a desire to stick the knife into the Abe cabinet.

Unfortunately, the debate turned out to be hardly worth hearing. The DPJ visibly lacked the skill to attack the ruling parties, allowing the prime minister and cabinet ministers easily fending off their questions.

First of all, the "politics and money" issue was brought up. It was only natural for the DPJ to question Agriculture Minister Matsuoka and Education and Science Minister Ibuki about suspicion over their office expenses reports. Refuted by them that they declared everything honestly, none of the DPJ questioners were unable to make attacks any further.

With such ways, it cannot be helped if such suspicion arises that the DPJ probably refrained from further pursuing Matsuoka and Ibuki as they have their own issue of party head Ozawa having declared as office expenses more than 400 million yen for the construction of a hall of residence for secretaries.

It has been a fortnight since Mr. Ozawa categorically said that he is ready to release receipts and related papers. What has become of that proposal? It is time for him to do so.

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Defense Minister Kyuma stated, "The US opened the Iraq war, based on the conviction that there were weapons of mass destruction in that country, but that decision may have been wrong." The DPJ repeatedly urged him to answer whether he made that statement as an individual or as a cabinet minister.

However, it was unable to pursue Kyuma any further when he rebutted in unison with the prime minister, "There was a justifiable reason for the government to decide to support the use of armed force by the US at that time."

The DPJ probably intended to cease upon discord among cabinet ministers, but we believe it has the wrong end of the stick regarding what people now really want to hear. What is important is why the Abe cabinet continues to cooperate for the Bush administration's Iraq policy amid growing criticism of the Iraq war even in the US and that reason is right or wrong. However hard the DPJ criticizes the Kyuma statement, its effort is far from being an argument grasping the essence of the issue.

Opposition parties, including the DPJ, sharpened their focus on social disparity debate.

To the point made by Kan that the economy has grown over the past five years, but wages have gone down, widening income disparity, the prime minister countered with the argument that the economic recovery has lowered the overall jobless rate and improved the percentage of new graduates who received job offers. Areas of contention have come into sight following the debate on social disparity, but the impression is that the debate is still at the threshold.

What disparities should be corrected? What areas is the government responsible for dealing with? What areas should be left to companies and individuals to work out? Discussion should be pursued after properly prioritizing policy proposals, including fiscal resources to finance those policies. However, there is a gap between the ruling and opposition camps regarding their perception of the present state and processes to carry out those policies.

We want both camps to pursue debate on the same wavelength, clarifying differences in their points for the next four months or so until the session ends. To begin with, we want opposition parties, such as the DPJ, which are on the offensive, to bestir themselves.

(8) Editorial: Prime minister's Diet replies denying existence of social disparity will never move debate forward

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)
February 14, 2007

In a meeting of the House of Representatives' Budget Committee yesterday, a heated debate was finally launched with such successive Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) presidents Naoto Kan, Katsuya Okada, and Seiji Maehara, as well as People's New Party Acting President Shizuka Kamei taking the floor as questioners. However, there was no probing debate. Over the issue of social disparity, in particular, differences between the ruling and opposition parties were conspicuous. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has yet to recognize the very existence of social disparity. As long as the prime minister has no awareness, thorough debate will never be conducted.

In response to a question by Kan, the prime minister said, "If some

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persons and regions are feeling that there is disparity, the Abe administration will shed light on the issue. That is one of this administration's major policies."

The above remark avoided mentioning if the prime minister even admits the existence of social disparity. Kan criticized the prime minister's insufficient awareness of the social inequality problem. In response, the prime minister said, "Income inequality is widening among those people in their 20s or 30s," but he refuted Kan, citing such numerical figures as the unemployment rate.

In the former Koizumi administration, Abe assumed such key posts as chief cabinet secretary. Given this, the prime minister has said that his administration basically succeeds to the Koizumi policies. The prime minister might be afraid of recognizing the existence of social disparity, which some regard as a "shadow" left behind by the Koizumi cabinet. Or he might think it is unwise, ahead of the House of Councillors elections this summer, to get on the same stage with Minshuto, which is calling for giving priority to redressing the social disparity in the current Diet session. He appears to be determined not to use the word "disparity," as if he believes that using the word itself represents his defeat.

Prime Minister Abe said, "It is natural that inequality exists between those who worked hard and others who did not." His view is true in a sense. Based on this view, he has proposed a "second chance" program to build a society in which fair competition is ensured. To that end, the prime minister insists on the need to take measures to continue economic growth and to bolster the financial footing of companies underpinning the economy. He emphasizes that such measures will lead to improving the household sector and the job market.

With only such measures, is it possible to settle problems? In the session yesterday, as well, the prime minister gave no specific account. Meanwhile, Okada emphasized: "Even if economic growth is maintained amid the advanced globalization of economic activities, a number of people will be left behind. How to cope with the problem of bipolarization in society is a political theme facing not only Japan but all countries in the world." Many must have felt that this message was more persuasive than Abe's.

Minshuto, however, has yet to detail its countermeasures. A bill amending the part-timers labor law, designed to improve the working conditions for part-time workers, was adopted in a cabinet meeting yesterday. On the bill, the prime minister said, "Let's discuss which is superior, the Minshuto proposal or the Liberal Democratic Party's." The people want to hear such an argument. The ruling and opposition parties should look at the present situation, acknowledge

the part of "shadow," and share the same perception of the problem to a certain extent; otherwise, they will never be able to conduct probing debate.

Thorough discussion was not conducted on the politics-and-money problem, either. Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Toshikatsu Matsuoka, who has been accused of improper accounting of his huge political expenses, did not indicate a willingness to give an explanation in sincere manner. He only said, "Political activities are different, depending on the lawmaker." The opposition camp also should be criticized for having allowed Matsuoka to make such a reply.

SCHIEFFER